June 4, 2024 | The Jerusalem Post

Bureij and Gaza's central camps are still Hamas bastions

The central camps is clearly a major challenge and will continue to be a base of threats in the future.

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The IDF has launched a new operation in **Gaza's el-Bureij** camp in central Gaza, one of several densely populated areas built as refugee camps in the 1950s. Mughazi, Deir el-Balah, and Nuseirat form the other major population centers in central Gaza. The entire area is not only Hamas-controlled but has largely remained untouched during the war.

The IDF did operate in el-Bureij back in January; however, in many cases, IDF sweeps of areas in Gaza did not destroy Hamas. In fact, in some cases, Hamas returned to areas, moving forces there from other areas, in essence becoming stronger.

This is because Hamas has been forced out of some places, like the area along **the Egyptian border** known as the Philadelphi corridor, and has transferred forces from Rafah back to Khan Yunis. Hamas also returned to northern Gaza, and in some cases has returned several times after the IDF has gone in, like it did in **Jabalya and Zeitun**.

The tactic is to go into an area, take out some Hamas members and terrorist infrastructure, and then leave. Each time the troops return, the theory is that Hamas becomes weaker, so fewer forces are needed and the operations are shorter. One way to conceptualize this is the "sandpaper" doctrine: Each time you pass over something to grind it down, you use a finer version of the sandpaper.

On the other hand, it can be argued that there are diminishing returns. Each time you go in, you find less terrorist infrastructure and fewer terrorists, but you never get to zero. Hamas always returns when the IDF leaves.

And, Israel's political class and defense establishment cannot agree on what comes next. Some want a day-after plan, while others want to see "bubbles" in Gaza, where local authorities can be transferred from Hamas to some other group, a plan that Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has systematically sought since January. But, there is no wider political will for that outcome. Israeli leaders, as a whole, oppose the Palestinian Authority, while on the far-right, the PA is seen as a greater threat than Hamas because it is the embodiment of a Palestinian state.

A catch-22

This creates a Catch-22 for Israel, one in which the IDF plays a central role. Troops go into areas in Gaza, clear them, and then leave and wait to see if a strategy will emerge. This is merely "managing" the conflict, or "mowing the grass." The IDF has done this in the West Bank for decades as well. So far, in the northern West Bank, this hasn't worked. The enemy is acquiring more weapons and is growing, while the PA continues to erode. Eventually, there will probably be a denouement, leading to chaos in an already complicated territory.

According to the IDF, one of the targets overnight Monday was a Hamas compound embedded in an UNRWA school in el-Bureij "from which Hamas terrorists operated and planned numerous attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF troops operating in the Gaza Strip," the military said. The el-Bureij raid is not the only operation taking place in Gaza – the IDF said there are similar operations in the Sabra area in northern Gaza.

The wider problem symbolized by the el-Bureij raid is that Hamas continues to control central Gaza. This enables Hamas to shift forces from Rafah to Khan Yunis, as well as toward the Netzarim corridor, where it can pose a threat to Israeli forces.

Hamas continues to control most of Gaza in this manner; much of the terrorist infrastructure in the central camps area likely remains relatively intact, clearly posing a major challenge, and it continues to be a base of threats in the future.

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